

Recycling and Refuse Management Committee

Landfill Alternatives Sub-Committee Minutes

May 11, 2011

Attendees: John Root, Meg Vickery, Laurel Dickey, Susan Morrello, Susan Waite, and Arlene Miller from the MA Department of Environmental Protection.

Minutes from 4/22/11 meeting were amended and approved.

Arlene Miller attended and gave an overview of trash disposal in the Pioneer Valley. She works with 100 towns in Western MA. Companies like Waste Management (typically landfill) and Covanta (waste-to-energy), are not concerned about lack of capacity because they can just ship excess trash (inexpensively-\$10-\$15 per ton) elsewhere. There is no incentive to reduce trash as this is how they make money.

Spot market or pay to throw systems (more variable pricing) are widespread in the waste industry now, so long term (20 year) hauler contracts w/municipalities are less common. This will continue as long as out-of-state disposal is cheaper.

Meg asked about Covanta's carbon footprint versus shipping trash out. Arlene responded that the DEP found that the biggest Springfield air pollution source is Interstate 91, which runs right through the city. Pollution-wise, a waste to energy facility is better than a landfill *IF* it is managed correctly. When the waste is burned at the correct temperature, dioxins aren't released. Metals are recaptured, and the remaining ash (a fraction of the trash's original volume) goes to lined landfills. The energy WTE facilities produce is cleaner than energy produced from burning coal.

Other states have fewer methane controls, which likely results in more methane being released.

Northampton wanted to expand it's landfill but it didn't pass. The town will continue operating its transfer station and thus send trash elsewhere. 50% of the residents use the drop off and the other 50% have trash pickup.

Duseau, a local trash hauler, owns newly opened Valley Recycling in Easthampton. It operates as a private transfer station for fee. The trash collected there is trucked to the Seneca Falls, NY landfill.

Arlene thinks new technology will come and source separation will come too. Northampton is proposing a zero-waste policy which would mean focusing on reducing packaging and removing organics from the waste stream. Arlene believes things will change in the Valley but thought it would have come sooner.

Laurel suggested that if landfills close then there will be pressure to change. It is good to encourage pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) programs.

Amherst does have *unit-based* pricing, with curbside per barrel pricing and per bag or item at transfer station. It is not considered a full PAYT system.

Carpet may be the next item that will be banned from landfills. Currently, the infrastructure is not good enough for carpet recycling to happen, however, a recycled carpet facility may be sited in MA.

John mentioned an expanded polystyrene (EPS, aka “Styrofoam ®”) ban. He thought there was at least one town (Great Barrington? Nantucket?) with such a ban (Note: EPS is banned from restaurant use in Seattle, WA). Arlene doesn’t think EPS bans are enforceable. The town, (schools etc.) themselves would have to be first in banning it. The Committee explained our plan to start with positive awards and incentives.

Arlene said that she considers zero-waste a big umbrella that other waste diversion strategies fall under, and recommends that Amherst adopt a zero-waste policy. It would be for awareness mostly. Awareness has influence on behavior change (e.g. use of plastic shopping bags has decreased as awareness has risen). With zero-waste, you have to start small. Arlene also feels that Product stewardship, with its emphasis on cradle-to-cradle life will have an impact in the future.

A list of trash disposal options was created:

- waste-to-energy option
- landfill
- ship waste out-of-state (probably to a landfill)
- bio-mass (burning virgin wood not good)
- gasification projects

Susan Waite thought the solar farm issue would be a factor regarding the direction we take in Amherst. If a solar farm (generally considered advantageous & inoffensive) fails at the old landfill site, a composting or gasification facility across the street at the Transfer Station is less likely to occur.

Arlene feels that a single-hauler system would be beneficial for Amherst if it were arranged as a PAYT with an opt-out option. With a single hauler, the town controls the contract requirements, ie pay-as-you-throw or a trash cop. Cop not needed if pay-as-you-throw. Risk of PAYT is potential increase of illegal dumping (including in bordering communities). Arlene doesn’t feel illegal dumping is a deal-breaking issue.

In Longmeadow, the first trash barrel is in the tax base, and after that additional bags follow a PAYT system (purchase stickers for extra bags). This system increased recycling.

Susan said three options discussed at our last meeting were:

1. Retain status quo and identify a new disposal location/method for transfer station trash
2. Close the transfer station
3. An innovative solution or hybrid of existing system and innovative approach

Arlene thought the best approach would be incremental changes with lots of changes.

With a single hauler scenario, the transfer station would not accept household trash. This should be cheaper for individuals. Arlene warned that haulers can undermine a move to a single hauler plan by reducing fees.

We need to analyze the system and current costs to see if it is worth it to keep the transfer station open. It currently operates at a loss. Its budget needs to be looked at. Fees should cover bulky waste. Look at hours of operation. Look at personnel and transportation costs. Schools pay \$100/ton fee. Trash from town buildings is free. Transfer Station fees should cover the cost of operation.

Arlene said not to panic. She believes we have time to make the decision and doesn't think the closing of the Northampton landfill won't affect Amherst so much.

We should look at how the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund is funded.

Questions/Research:

- ✓ Susan – Provide cost/economic budget analysis of Transfer Station.
- ✓ Arlene – Investigate zero-waste policy as goal and will send to Susan any written policies for better understanding of pros and cons.
- ✓ Susan – Research user trends at Transfer Station, i.e., amount of trash and # of users.
- ✓ Meg – Contact Duseau and Amherst Trucking. Where do they bring trash? What do they charge? When do they expect fees to go up?

Zero-waste proponents that could speak to the committee:

Clare Miller – Toxics Action Center's Community Organizer for Connecticut and Western Massachusetts (re: getting communities activated & motivated)

Sylvia Broude – Organizing Director for Toxics Action Center

Lynn Pledger – Clean Water Action (re: EPR & zero-waste)

Next meeting: June 15th, 3pm